



Call to Order

The E-Newsletter of the Senate Majority Caucus

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Key Measures to Conference Committees

Budget, Ice, Education

Measures relating to the State budget, educational reform, and the ice epidemic passed a key step on Friday, April 2, when they passed third reading by decisive margins. Discrepancies between the House and Senate versions must now be hammered out in the conference committees that will meet in the coming days to resolve those differences.

Financial Resources

Ways and Means Chair Senator Brian Taniguchi (D-10th, Manoa, McCully) described the budget bill (HB1800, HD1, SD1), which is being reviewed in conference this week, as "the centerpiece of our financial plan." The measure "provides much-needed resources to crucial government programs" such as education and health care and provides funding for government employee contracts. The budget bill passed third reading on the Senate by a 22-2 vote.

Impact on Achievement

Conference committee hearings are under way on the education omnibus bill (SB3238). In the words of Senate Committee on Education Vice Chair Sen. Gary L. Hooser (D-7th, Kauai, Niihau), the bill will have "a direct and positive impact on student achievement." It reflects "a broad range of agreement" on school



Senator Brian Taniguchi (center) at the first conference committee discussion of the state budget. From left to right: Senators Kokobun, Taniguchi, Kawamoto, and Kim.

reform proposals that have been widely discussed this year — including the weighted student formula, which allocates funding to schools according to individual student needs, broader decision-making at the school level, smaller class sizes, and added power for school principals.

Substance Abuse Bill

The conference committee vehicles dealing with the ice epidemic are HB2003, which amends existing laws pertaining to criminal conduct, and HB2004, which appropriates funding for prevention and treatment programs. Conferees have been appointed for each measure, and hearings will be scheduled this week. The bills reflect the findings of the Joint House-Senate Task Force on Ice and Drug Abatement, which conducted extensive hearings in the interim between sessions, gathering over 400 hours of testimony.

Bills in all three areas — education, drug abatement, and the budget — could go to the Senate floor as early as next week.

Governor Recommends Against HGEA Pay Raises

Governor Lingle said on Tuesday, April 6 that she was planning to recommend against the funding of arbitrated pay raises for the Hawaii Government Employees Association (HGEA). An arbitration panel has awarded a two-year contract to HGEA that continues the merit-based step movement plan for which union members went on strike in 1994. The step movement plan and a 5 percent pay raise would take effect January 1, 2005.

Senate President Robert Bunda (D-22nd, North Shore, Wahiawa) said the

Governor's intentions were a clear violation of the statute governing binding arbitration — and that the law should be honored.

"Binding arbitration to me is final," he said. "How can we go back? We honor what came out of the process as approved by law."

Governor has said that she wants the Legislature to put an end to binding arbitration, but Senate President Bunda says "We have to honor the law as it stands now. The mediator and arbitrator recommend to the Legislature; we think it is a fair process. The Governor obviously disagrees with them."

He said the Legislature expects that the raises will be funded. "Our financial plan is moving in such a way that we are moving toward accommodating these raises," he said.

The Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) is also facing an important contract issue. Negotiations for HSTA pay raises began April 6, and the Governor is expected to make an offer lower than the arbitrated amount for HGEA. The United Public Workers Union (UPW) is also in line for contract negotiations with the State.

Former Army Chief of Staff Shinseki Addresses Senators in Floor Speech



General Shinseki, his wife Pat, and Mrs. Shinseki's former Pearl City High School student, Senator David Ige.

The former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Eric Shinseki, addressed the assembled members of the State Senate on March 30. General Shinseki is the highest ranking American of Japanese Ancestry to ever serve in the Army. He spoke to the Senators about growing up on Kauai (he was born in Lihue) and of the importance of continuing education. General Shinseki is a West Point graduate who has served his country in combat and peacetime. In two

Vietnam combat tours, he earned two Purple Hearts and four Bronze Stars.

Senator Cal Kawamoto (D-18th, Waipahu, Crestview, Pearl City), said, "Under his four-year term, he transformed the U.S. Army, especially through the development of the Stryker Brigade, to meet new challenges against the threats of war and global terrorism."



Senators greet General Shinseki and his wife on the Senate floor. From left to right: Senator Shan Tsutsui, Senator Donna Kim, Senator Lorraine Inouye, General and Mrs. Shinseki, Senator Cal Kawamoto.

Ways and Means Restores Hawaii Health Systems Funding



Dr. Richard Wayne Fukino of Kauai Veterans Memorial Hospital at West Kauai Medical Center in Waimea testifies before members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

Vital health services delivered by the Hawaii Health Systems Corporation (HHSC) will be allowed to continue without interruption in the wake of a March 31 vote in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means that restored \$11.2 million to HHSC's budget. HHSC is the largest health provider for Neighbor Island

residents, providing acute, rural, and long-term care.

Its twelve facilities are located in East Hawaii (Hilo Medical Center, Hale Ho'ola Hamakua, and Kau Hospital); West Hawaii (Kona Community Hospital and Kohala Hospital); Maui (Maui Memorial Medical Center, Kula Hospital, and Lanai Community Hospital); Oahu (Leahi Hospital and Maluhia); and Kauai (Kauai Veterans Memorial Hospital and Samuel Mahelona Memorial Hospital).

Health Committee Chair Senator Rosalyn Baker (D-5th, South Maui, West Maui) wrote in a Maui News guest editorial: "HHSC has a vital mission that no other institution can address: to provide care in far-flung areas that are not served by any other health care provider. Although HHSC is 90 percent self-supporting, it must ask the Legislature for an additional 10 percent to allow for "safety net" health coverage across the State. That safety net is there to respond to a critical and growing need."



Small Business Advocate Recognized for Community Service

Senator Gary L. Hooser spoke with Robin Joy Puanani Danner of the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), who is being honored by the U.S. Small Business Administration as Minority Small Business Advocate of the Year, as she is given a certificate in her honor. The Council promotes the advancement of Native Hawaiians through empowerment and informational initiatives. The non-profit organization's membership includes members of a variety of Native Hawaiian organizations. CNHA works to encourage collaboration and the formation of partnerships among them.



Senators Commend Kalakaua Lions Club Service Record

Kenneth Yee of the Kalakaua Lions Club; Sen. Norman Sakamoto; Kay Kuwamoto, Kalakaua Lions President; Senator Donna Kim; Carl Sherry, Immediate Past President of Kalihi Palama Community Council; and Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland after a Senate presentation honoring the Kalakaua Lions' community outreach efforts. These include helping 12 public schools, constructing bus shelters, assisting the hearing and visually handicapped with financial aid and physical help, supporting the Kalihi-Palama Community Council, the Kalihi YMCA, Bishop Museum, and Saint Anthony's Health Fair.